

Paws For Thought

On The Road Again

It is summertime, and our thoughts turn to cottages, lakes, sandy beaches and BBQ's with family and friends. As Canadians, we relish the thoughts of basking in the sunshine for a few precious months a year and there is nothing more fun than including the family dog. While it can be a great experience to travel with Sparky, there are some things to consider before you ask him to jump into the car.

Setting up your vehicle for safety and convenience will take some planning but will be well worth the effort. Many of us love to drive with our windows down, and while your dog may love the feel of the breeze on his face, it is not the best idea. There are plastic grids that you can purchase, that clip onto the top of a window. This will allow you to open your window, but your dog will have to enjoy the view from inside the vehicle. Sticks or small stones tend to fly up from the wheels and may lodge in an eye.



Dog seat belts are a fabulous tool. Think of your dog as you would think of a child. Children are not allowed to sit on the lap of an adult while driving, and in fact can't sit in the front seat of a car until they are a certain size. The risk of them being suffocated by a deployed airbag is high. Our dogs deserve the same consideration. They should be belted into the back seat and not allowed to wander around your vehicle. There have been cases of small dogs getting under the pedals of a car, not to mention the distraction of having your dog sit on your lap while driving. By keeping your dog confined to one area of the car, you will also decrease any stress they might feel, by decreasing their ability to pace. They will soon settle down for a long snooze. Another way to travel is by having your dog inside a crate. This allows your dog the comfort of having his own space. You can attach a drinking cup there, and his blanket and chew toys will make the journey fun.

Take some biscuits, or even Sparky's next meal if it is a long journey. Remember to pack any of his medications and a first aid kit. There are great selections of collapsible food and water bowls that pack very small and are great for hiking. A large jug of water from home is best, as some dogs don't do well if their water source is changed, as it might if you are going any distance. If you run out of water, it is preferable to use bottled rather than local tap water. You don't want to deal with an upset tummy while you are on holidays. A roll of paper towels for unforeseen accidents, and some pick up bags for your pit stops should also be readily available.

Make sure your dog is properly identified. If you are going for any length of time, make sure you have a tag secured to his collar that will reflect the information of the location. You can buy instant tags at some pet shops, so your cell is readily available. Microchipping is great, and I would strongly suggest it, but I would also have a tag. To get a microchip read, your dog will need to be taken to a Veterinary Clinic or shelter, and they may have limited weekend hours.

Do some research before you start your trip. You should be aware of where local Veterinarians are in the towns you will be visiting. This

might save precious time. Take along your dog's health records and vaccination papers in case they are needed. Know where to find your brand of dog food, especially if your dog has a sensitive system

It should go without saying but let's say it anyway. If you are taking your dog to a friend's home, please make sure he is welcome. Calling in advance is best and finding out (then adhering to) any household rules will make him a well-loved guest. Make sure that no one in the family has any pet allergies. If you allow your dog on the furniture at home, but your friend has a different set of rules, it is courteous to keep your dog on his own bed. Keep your dog's comfort in mind. If he doesn't like children, and you are visiting someone with a brood of kids, it might be best to board him at a fun dog camp for the weekend. And on the same note, if you have a dog that suffers from carsickness, and you are planning a long road trip, please rethink your decision to include him.

If you will be staying at a hotel, make sure you double-check their dog policy. It is nice to see that there are more and more hotels welcoming dogs, and it is up to us to maintain that for everyone else. Take along an old sheet and when you get to your hotel room, remove the bedspread and cover the bed with your sheet. While linens are changed daily, I'm sure their bedspread must be dry cleaned.

It is important, while staying at a hotel, that your dog be crated if you are out of the room. Even if you have a well-behaved dog, and you are just popping out for dinner, accidents can occur. Your dog may get spooked and knock a lamp or chew part of a rug...it just won't be worth it. Of course, if your dog is a barker or is not comfortable in a crate, perhaps consider room service. The hotel will thank you.

It is great fun to travel with your dog. Yes, there are a few drawbacks. You won't be able to leave your dog in the car along the way, so a trip into the restaurant it out. But, with a little planning, a roadside picnic sounds like a lot more fun and the whole family, 2 footed and 4 footed, can enjoy it.